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**LOCAL WHEELCHAIR TEAM GETS READY FOR
NATIONAL VETERANS WHEELCHAIR GAMES**

MINNEAPOLIS – Hoping for a "home court" advantage, 30 wheelchair athletes affiliated with the Minnesota VA & PVA Wheelchair Team are gearing up for the 25th National Veterans Wheelchair Games, taking place in and around Minneapolis, June 27 – July 1.

The largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world, the Games are a joint effort of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), and will be hosted locally by the Minneapolis VA Medical Center and the Minnesota PVA Chapter. More than 500 wheelchair athletes from across the United States, Puerto Rico and Great Britain will participate in 16 athletic competitions at the 2005 event. The Games are open to all U.S. military veterans who use wheelchairs for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, certain neurological conditions, amputations or other mobility impairments.

Competitive events will be held at the Minneapolis Convention Center, University of St. Thomas, Lake Harriet, Fort Snelling soccer fields and other local venues. The 2005 Games will include four full days of competition in track, swimming, basketball, weightlifting, softball, quad rugby, handcycling, field events, air guns, 9-ball, bowling, table tennis, archery, a motorized wheelchair rally, power soccer and wheelchair slalom, which is a timed obstacle course. Trap shooting, golf and a powerchair relay are being offered as exhibition events. The athletes compete in all events against others with similar athletic ability, competitive experience or age.

In addition to the competitions and the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, the event includes a Games Kick-off on June 27 in Peavy Plaza at 11:45 a.m., featuring a wheelchair basketball demonstration. On Wednesday, June 29, the Wheelchair Games head to the Mall of America for a wheelchair sports demonstration beginning at 5 p.m. at Sam Goody Central.

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Local Wheelchair Team Prepares for 2005 National Games 2/2/22

"Kid's Day at the Games" is on Thursday, June 30, when local children, including some with disabilities, will interact with the athletes, participate in some sports events and watch the veterans compete. Spectators are welcome at all sports competitions throughout the week. Admission to all events and activities is free.

While past Games have produced a number of national and world-class champions, they also provide opportunities for newly injured veterans to gain sports skills and meet other wheelchair athletes and competitors. Area athletes competing this year include Richard Jost of Apple Valley; Jerry Price of Minneapolis; and Charlie Wittwer of Cloquet, Minn.

In 1981, Jost was one of the original 74 veterans who competed in the very first National Veterans Wheelchair Games held in Richmond, Va. "The event has gone from a little over 70 competitors to more than 500, and the level of competition has also increased," Jost said. "I went on to compete in subsequent Games, but the lessons I learned that first time remain with me to this day – finish what you start and believe in yourself." Jost will compete in handcycling and bowling at the Games this year.

The Minnesota VA & PVA Wheelchair Team, made up of male and female veterans from Minnesota and parts of western Wisconsin, compete in the national Games every year. For many, this is the first time the event is close enough for family and friends to attend.

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Media Inquiries:

During the Games from June 26-July 1, call the National Veterans Wheelchair Games Media Center at (612) 335-6668 or (612) 335-6669.

Before June 25 or after July 2, call DeAnne Pavel, VA Public Affairs, at (612) 725-2102-7824; or Sharyl Schaepe, at (402) 484-3225.

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Area athletes among the 2005 Minneapolis VA Wheelchair Team Members

| Veteran Competitor | Home Town | Event |
|---------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Andrew Bernstrom | Champlin, Minnesota | Softball; slalom (manual chair); bowling (manual); weightlifting |
| Norman Coone | New Hope, Minnesota | Field – shot; basketball; softball; field- javelin; bowling (manual) |
| Jan Michael Denfeld | Stockholm, Wisconsin | Swimming (100 yd. backstroke); archery (para/amp with recurve bow); swimming (100 yd. breaststroke and 100 yd. freestyle); air guns (para) |
| Harlan Ebert | Brainerd, Minnesota | field – discus, shot and javelin; archery (para/amp with compound bow); air guns (para) |
| Michael Hancock | Crosby, Montana | Bowling; slalom; motorized rally; 9-ball; and exhibitions: power relay and golf |
| David Hopkins | Chicago City, Minnesota | slalom (motorized, hand control); air guns (quad); bowling - ramp (hand control); table tennis |
| Richard Jost* | Apple Valle, Minnesota | Hand cycling and bowling (manual) |
| Tod Kemery | Lakeville, Minnesota | Swimming (25 yd. backstroke); quad rugby;; softball, field – javelin; Exhibition Events- golf and trap shooting |
| Jerry Klemm | Forest Lake, Minnesota | Bowling - ramp (hand control); motorized wheelchair rally; table tennis; air guns (quad) |
| Jerry Price* | Minneapolis, Minnesota | Field – shot, javelin, and discus; hand cycling; weightlifting |
| Oliver Skov | Minneapolis, Minnesota | Slalom (motorized, hand control); power soccer (hand control); bowling - ramp (hand control) |
| Douglas Simon | Vaseli, Minnesota | Archery; slalom; bowling; and 9-ball |
| Donald Stancile | Minneapolis, Minnesota | Archery (para/amp with recurve bow); track (100 meters); 9-ball (para) |
| Nicholas Suckow* | Dallas, Wisconsin | Bowling - ramp (head/mouth control); slalom (motorized, head/chin control); motorized wheelchair rally; Exhibition Event: power chair relay (mouth control) |
| Kenneth Walsh | Danbury, Wisconsin | Archery; field – club throw; weightlifting, air guns; bowling |
| Jason Wittling | Mason, Wisconsin | Hand cycling and air guns (quad) |
| Charlie Wittwer* | Cloquet, Minnesota | Swimming (50 yd. backstroke); basketball; slalom (manual chair); Exhibition Event: golf softball; swimming (50 yd. freestyle) |

*Athlete profiles on these competitors are available on the Games web site (see News Media page). www.wheelchairgames.org

Beginning June 30, individual news releases and photos on all competitors will be available on the Games web site (see Athlete Information page). For more information about the National Veterans Wheelchair Games or to follow events as they happen, visit the web site at www.wheelchairgames.org.